

Peace

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Matthew 5:5

Canaan. The promised land. A place that represented freedom. This was God's promise to the Israelites, "a land flowing with milk and honey" (Deuteronomy 6:3). There were many promises embedded within this land "to give you large and beautiful cities which you did not build, houses full of all good things, which you did not fill, hewn-out wells which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant" (Deuteronomy 6:11). Deuteronomy 28 records a long list of ways that God promised to bless Israel:

And the Lord will grant you plenty of goods, in the fruit of your body, in the increase of your livestock and the produce of your ground...the Lord will open to you His good treasure, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season, and to bless all the work of your hand. You shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow. (28:11-12)

Israel was to be unstoppable and rich beyond imagination. But there was only one catch:

...If you heed the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you today, and are careful to observe them. So you shall not turn aside from any of the words which I command you this day, to the right or the left, to go after other gods to serve them. (Deuteronomy 28:13-14)

Israel's inheritance of the land was tied to their submission and obedience to God's commands. Throughout their history as a nation, when they followed God, they experienced great blessing, but when they turned away, they experienced God's judgement. Eventually, their propensity to go their own way and refusal to bow to God's will resulted in the complete loss of their land and slavery in foreign lands. Even though they eventually regained their own land, they only briefly (approximately 40 years) ruled themselves without foreign overlords.

So as Jesus, their Messiah, began His public ministry, He reminds them of God's historical promise. Meekness—a humble, submissive spirit—was the requirement to find rest in the land. Many of the Jews in that day never saw beyond the promise of the physical land. Their stated goal was political sovereignty over their own land (Acts 1:6).

What they missed in this was that the original promise incorporated far more than just the land. "I will walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people" (Leviticus 28:12). Jesus was literally this promise fulfilled. And what He offered was far more than freedom from political enemies. But just like in the past, they had to submit to God's authority.

Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light. (Matthew 11:28-30)

In another place, Jesus uses a different example. "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (Luke 9:28). The requirement to receive the promise is a spirit of meekness—humbly accepting God's will and obediently following His commands. A life of peace, a life resting in the goodness of the promises of God awaits when we accept His challenge and humble ourselves before Him.

There we find joy.

The Joy of Humility

But the meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace. Psalm 37:11

Accepting God's Terms

Hebrews 11 is the celebrated "Heroes of the Faith" chapter. Through the accounts of the lives of those who went before us in the faith, the author builds an argument about the importance of living a life that prioritizes the will of God. In **Hebrews 11:13-16**, what are the reasons that they accepted God's challenge? *Were assured of the promises, embraced that they were strangers on earth, sought a homeland given them by God.*

Ultimately, what kind of homeland were they searching for according to **verse 16**? *A heavenly country*

Notice God's attitude towards them in **verse 16**. What does that tell us about the importance of accepting God's challenge? *God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them. Have you ever planned a party, and no one came? God has so many good things prepared for us, yet if we refuse to accept His challenge, we miss out on them.*

Hebrews 11:24-27 summarizes Moses' acceptance of God's challenge when he rejected life as an Egyptian and embraced life as a Jew. What were his motivations? *He saw living for God as a greater reward than living in comfort in Egypt. He was looking for a heavenly reward rather than an earthly one.*

Based upon the testimony of these heroes in Hebrews 11, what does **Hebrews 12:1-2** encourage us to do? *let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us*

As we look to Jesus, our ultimate example of meekness (v. 2), what promise of eventual peace do we see in the arc of His story? *Has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God*

As we see in the example of the Israelites, accepting God's challenge is only half the step to a life of peace and rest. The other steps are remaining committed and following through. In **1 Peter 5:6-9**, we are given some helpful instructions regarding this. Peter reminds us that we must be willing to:

1. Trust in God's *Faithfulness (cast all your care upon Him)*
2. Engage in *Spiritual Warfare (the devil prowls among us)*
3. Wait on God's *Reward (He may exalt you in due time)*

Let's look at each of these in greater detail.



Trust in God's Faithfulness

In **Matthew 6:25-34**, Jesus discusses the promise God makes to us to care for us. What does God promise to provide for us? *Food, drink, clothing, our life, the future*

Jesus provides two examples of God's faithful care. The first is the birds whom God feeds. What does Jesus point out that the birds never do? *they do not grow or store food*

There are, however, animals that do store up food, and even farm such as ants and bees (See **Proverbs 6:6; Proverbs 30:25**). How do we reconcile their dedication to the carefree spirit of the birds? *God gives the birds wisdom as well. Consider the way they migrate based upon the seasons. In the same way, we should view the provisions of God in our lives as a sign of His care for us. Just as there is great variety in the way God provides for animals, so there is variety in the way He provides for His individual children. We need to be wise stewards of what God has given us, but in a way that allows us to live carefree like the birds because we know that ultimately all we have comes from God.*

The second example Jesus provides is the beauty of nature. God grows beautiful wildflowers for no other reason than just because He wants to. They serve no purpose beyond beautifying our world. What does this tell us about God's view of beauty? *We all see and recognize the beauty of nature. God values beauty—it is an inherent quality of His character, otherwise we would not have a universal standard for what is beautiful.*

Does beautifying our world matter? *If it matters to God, it should matter to us. More importantly, we should embrace standards of beauty that are universal and align with God's character. This can be difficult when we live in a world that has been driven by a worldly culture and sinful views of beauty. Christians and the church should uphold good art and beauty because they influence our culture.*

But just like we can be overly concerned with food, we can be overly concerned with beauty. How does the image of grass—here today, gone tomorrow—help us reconcile the importance we should place on beauty? *As women, we were created to be admired for our beauty. That is clearly seen in the Old Testament descriptions of beautiful women. We should not be ashamed of beauty or of our interest in it. If married, we should strive to be desirable to our husbands. And we should seek to make ourselves look the best we can. At the same time though, we need to be balanced in our pursuit of beauty. Great beauty isn't something we can acquire, it is a part of our identity God endows us with from birth. We need to accept ourselves as God created us to be and recognize that how we look was ultimately part of His plan for our lives.*

How do we compare to the birds in God's eyes? *We are much more valuable than they are.*

Jesus goes so far as to say that the wildflowers surpass Solomon's glory. Sometimes we think that obedience to God's will means that we will miss out on the good things of life. But is that what He is actually saying? *If God cares more about us than the birds, He certainly cares more about us than the flowers. Yet He is very concerned that they have the very best, just like the birds. God also wants to give us the best, but the best that is good for us and won't harm us.*



What is the opposite of trust? What example does Jesus give to show how powerless it is? *Worry. We can't grow any taller from worrying, it accomplishes nothing in our lives.*

What are we to prioritize above all else in life according to **Matthew 6:31- 34**? *Pursuing God's kingdom*

What should our attitude be about the future? *It is in God's hands.*

Fight the Good Fight

While the Promise Land is often viewed as a symbol of rest, historically it was not for the Jews. First, they had to fight to acquire the land, and then they had to fight off those who would invade them. Even today, they have to fight to maintain their homeland. As Peter reminded us, the devil is constantly on the prowl trying to take us down, so we can't be complacent in our Christian lives. In **2 Corinthians 10:3-6**, Paul described the kind of warfare we are to pursue as Christians. How does it differ from that of world?

- It is not *evil* but through *God's power* (v 4)
- It is directed at the *arguments* that stand against God's *truth* (v. 5)
- It is *internal* and *personal* – taking every *thought* into captivity (v. 5)
- It is focused upon *obedience—ready to punish all disobedience* (1 Corinthians 9:24-27)

Our warfare is different because our purpose is different. What kind of enemy are we fighting according to **Ephesians 6:12**? *Spiritual enemies – demonic activity*

How does this differ from the world's perspective of who we are fighting? How should the differences in our purpose change our interactions with those who hate us? *The world sees the fight as physical against those who they hate or whose values they do not like. We must see the battle as spiritual. These are people who are being controlled by Satan, we must focus on being controlled by the Spirit so that we can effectively engage in the spiritual battle that is really being fought.*

In **2 Corinthians 5:10-11**, what should be our motivation as we battle for God's truth in this world? *Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men... The salvation of those bound to Satan.*

Fight Evil Ideas

Persuading men requires us to know the truth we are fighting for. **James 3:15-18** contrasts God's wisdom with Satan's wisdom. What characterizes each kind?

Satan's Wisdom	God's Wisdom
<i>earthly, sensual, demonic envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there</i>	<i>from above pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy</i>

What is the fruit of righteousness and how does it grow in our world? *peace*



Act Upon the Truth

What does **James 1:22-25** warn us is will harm us in our fight for truth? *A failure to live out the truth in our own life. Hypocrisy will make our witness ineffective.*

This is why Paul encourages us in **Ephesians 6:13-17** to put on the armor God has given us as we engage in this battle. The pieces are:

Belt of *truth*

Shield of *faith*

Body armor of *God's righteousness*

Helmet of *salvation*

Shoes of *peace* from the Gospel

Sword of the Spirit (*God's Word*)

As we long for peace in this world, we cannot get tired of the fight. How does prayer give us the strength we need to keep fighting according to **Ephesians 6:18-20**?

- Pray *always*
- Be *alert* for every *occasion* that needs prayer
- Pray for *other believers*
- Pray for the *empowering* of the Spirit as we witness
- Pray for *boldness* as we witness.

Wait on God's Reward

From a human standpoint, meekness is a total loss. The world believes in self-promotion and vanity. Someone once said, "If you don't toot your own trumpet, no one's going to toot it for you." Often this seems to work for people. But what did Jesus caution about this in **Matthew 6:1-2**? *It results in a loss of heavenly rewards. Our reward ends up being the adulation and approval we get from others.*

In **Psalms 37:7-11**, what is promised to those who wait humbly on God? *An abundance of peace. That we will live in peace and prosperity.*

A life of peace and rest comes in our humble dependence on God. We must depend on God to not only supply our needs, but also to fight for us and protect us in the spiritual battle that rages around us. Absolute peace will never come in this life, but in the next. For that we wait, diligently fighting the battle for God's truth and resting in the knowledge that God is in control.

Psalms 37:3-6 reminds us of this.

Trust in the Lord, and do good;
Dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness.
Delight yourself also in the Lord,
And He shall give you the desires of your heart.

Commit your way to the Lord,
Trust also in Him,
And He shall bring it to pass.
He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light,
And your justice as the noonday.

